



# Central Asia Struggles

## MAIN IDEA

### POWER AND AUTHORITY

Lands controlled or influenced by the Soviet Union struggle with the challenges of establishing new nations.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The security issues in these nations pose a threat to world peace and security.

## TERMS & NAMES

- Transcaucasian Republics
- Central Asian Republics
- mujahideen
- Taliban

**SETTING THE STAGE** For thousands of years, the different peoples of Central Asia suffered invasions and domination by powerful groups such as the Mongols, Byzantines, Ottomans, and finally the Communist rulers of the Soviet Union. While such occupation brought many changes to this region, its various ethnic groups worked to keep alive much of their culture. They also longed to create nations of their own, a dream they realized in the early 1990s with the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the decade since then, however, these groups have come to know the challenges of building strong and stable independent nations.

## TAKING NOTES

**Outlining** Use an outline to organize main ideas and details.

### *Freedom Brings New Challenges*

- A.
- B.

### *Afghanistan and the World*

- A.
- B.

## Freedom Brings New Challenges

In 1991 the Soviet Union collapsed, and the republics that it had conquered emerged as 15 independent nations. Among them were those that had made up the Soviet empire's southern borders. Geographers often group these new nations into two geographic areas.

Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia make up the [Transcaucasian Republics](#). These three nations lie in the Caucasus Mountains between the Black and Caspian seas. East of the Caspian Sea and extending to the Tian Shan and Pamir mountains lie the five nations known as the [Central Asian Republics](#). They are Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan.

**Economic Struggles** Since gaining independence, these nations have struggled economically and are today some of the poorest countries in the world. Much of the problem stems from their heavy reliance on the Soviet Union for economic help. As a result, they have had a difficult time standing on their own. Economic practices during the Soviet era have created additional problems. The Soviets, for example, converted much of the available farmland in the Central Asian Republics to grow “white gold”—cotton. Dependence on a single crop has hurt the development of a balanced economy in these nations.

Azerbaijan, which is located among the oil fields of the Caspian Sea, has the best chance to build a solid economy based on the income from oil and oil products. Meanwhile, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are working hard to tap their large reserves of oil and natural gas.

**Ethnic and Religious Strife** Fighting among various ethnic and religious groups has created another obstacle to stability for many of the newly independent

countries of Central Asia. The region is home to a number of different peoples, including some with long histories of hostility toward each other. With their iron-fisted rule, the Soviets kept a lid on these hostilities and largely prevented any serious ethnic clashes. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, however, long-simmering ethnic rivalries erupted into fighting. Some even became small regional wars.

Such was the case in Azerbaijan. Within this mostly Muslim country lies Nagorno-Karabakh, a small region of mainly Armenian Christians. In the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse, the people of this area declared their independence. Azerbaijan had no intention of letting go of this land, and fighting quickly broke out. Neighboring Armenia rushed to aid the Armenian people in the district. The war raged from 1991 through 1994, when the two sides agreed to a cease-fire. The status of Nagorno-Karabakh remains unresolved. **A**

#### MAIN IDEA

#### Clarifying

**A** Why was there little ethnic or religious strife in Central Asia during Soviet rule?

## Afghanistan and the World

Just to the south of the Central Asian Republics lies one of the region's more prominent nations. Afghanistan is a small nation with both mountainous and desert terrain. It is one of the least-developed countries in the world, as most of its inhabitants are farmers or herders. And yet, over the past several decades, this mostly Muslim nation has grabbed the world's attention with two high-profile wars—one against the Soviet Union and the other against the United States.

**Struggle for Freedom** Afghanistan has endured a long history of struggle. During the 1800s, both Russia and Britain competed for control of its land. Russia wanted access to the Indian Ocean through Afghanistan, while Britain wanted control of the land in order to protect the northern borders of its Indian Empire. Britain fought three separate wars with the Afghans before eventually leaving in 1919.

▼ The terrain of Central Asia varies widely, from mountains to plains.



#### GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Maps

- 1. Location** Which Transcaucasian Republic nation extends the farthest east?
- 2. Place** Which is the only Central Asian Republic that neither contains nor has access to a sea or lake?



That year, Afghanistan declared itself an independent nation and established a monarchy. The government implemented various reforms and tried to modernize the country. In 1964, the country devised a constitution that sought to establish a more democratic style of government. However, officials could not agree on a reform program and most people showed little interest in the effort to transform the government. As a result, a democratic system failed to develop.

**Pushing Back the Soviets** Nonetheless, Afghanistan had grown stable enough to establish good relations with many Western European nations and to hold its own on the world stage. When the Cold War conflict between the United States and Soviet Union broke out, Afghanistan chose to remain neutral. However, over the years, it received aid from both of the opposing superpowers.

Situated so close to the Soviet Union, however, Afghanistan could not hold out against the force of communism forever. In 1973, military leaders overthrew the government. Five years later, in 1978, a rival group with strong ties to the Soviet

Union seized control of the country. Much of the population opposed the group and its strong association with communism. Many Afghans felt that Communist policies conflicted with the teachings of Islam.

The opposition forces banded together to form a group known as the **mujahideen** (moo•JAH•heh•DEEN), or holy warriors. These rebels took up arms and fought fiercely against the Soviet-supported government. The rebellion soon prompted the Soviet Union to step in. In 1979 and 1980, Soviet troops rolled into Afghanistan to conquer the country and add it to their Communist empire.

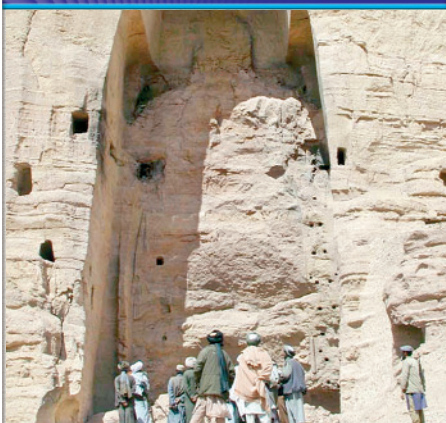
With the Soviets' superior military force and advanced weaponry, the war had all the makings of a quick and lopsided affair. But the Afghan rebels used the land and guerilla tactics to their advantage. In addition, the United States provided financial and military assistance. After nearly 10 years of bloody and fruitless fighting, the Soviet Union withdrew its troops. The Afghans had taken on the world's Communist superpower and won. **B**

**Rise and Fall of the Taliban** With the Soviets gone, various Afghan rebel groups began battling each other for control of the country. A conservative Islamic group known as the **Taliban** emerged as the victor. By 1998, it controlled 90 percent of the country. Another rebel group, the Northern Alliance, held the northwest corner of the country. Observers initially viewed the Taliban as a positive force, as it brought order to the war-torn nation, rooted out corruption, and promoted the growth of business.

However, the group followed an extreme interpretation of Islamic law and applied it to nearly every aspect of Afghan society. Taliban leaders restricted women's lives by forbidding them to go to school or hold jobs. They banned everything from television and movies to modern music. Punishment for violating the rules included severe beatings, amputation, and even execution.

Even more troubling to the world community was the Taliban's role in the growing problem of world terrorism, which you will read more about in Chapter 36. Western

## History *in* Depth



### Destroying the Past

Among the Taliban's extreme policies that stemmed from their interpretation of Islam, one in particular shocked and angered historians around the world. In the years after gaining power, Taliban leaders destroyed some of Afghanistan's most prized artifacts—two centuries-old Buddhas carved out of cliffs.

The Taliban deemed the giant statues offensive to Islam. Ignoring pleas from scholars and museums, they demolished the ancient figures with dynamite and bombs. One of the two statues was thought to have dated back to the third century A.D.

### INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY

**INTERNET ACTIVITY** Choose a country and highlight its top archaeological treasures. Go to **classzone.com** for your research.

### MAIN IDEA

#### Drawing Conclusions

**B** Why do you think the Soviets finally decided to leave Afghanistan?

leaders accused the Taliban of allowing terrorist groups to train in Afghanistan. The Taliban also provided refuge for terrorist leaders, including Osama bin Laden, whose al-Qaeda organization is thought to be responsible for numerous attacks on the West—including the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., on September 11, 2001.

In the wake of the September 11 attacks, the U.S. government demanded that the Taliban turn over bin Laden. After its leaders refused, the United States took military action. In October 2001, U.S. forces began bombing Taliban air defense, airfields, and command centers, as well as al-Qaeda training camps. On the ground, the United States provided assistance to anti-Taliban forces, such as the Northern Alliance. By December, the United States had driven the Taliban from power.

**Challenges Ahead** With the Taliban defeated, Afghan officials selected a new government under the leadership of Hamid Karzai. His government faces the enormous task of rebuilding a country that has endured more than two decades of warfare. What's more, Afghanistan remains a country of roughly a dozen ethnic groups with distinct language and cultural patterns, all of which makes the job of creating a unified nation a difficult one.

The challenge before Afghanistan, however, is neither unique nor new. As you will read in the next chapter, over the past 50 years countries around the world have attempted to shed their old and often repressive forms of rule and implement a more democratic style of government.



▲ Captured Taliban fighters look out from a jail cell near the Afghani capital of Kabul.

## SECTION

## 5

## ASSESSMENT

**TERMS & NAMES** 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Transcaucasian Republics
- Central Asian Republics
- mujahideen
- Taliban

### USING YOUR NOTES

2. Which challenge for the Central Asian nations is most difficult to overcome?

*Freedom Brings New Challenges*

- A.
- B.

*Afghanistan and the World*

- A.
- B.

### MAIN IDEA

- 3. What countries make up the Transcaucasian Republics? the Central Asian Republics?
- 4. Why did Afghanis oppose the notion of Communist rule?
- 5. Why did the United States take military action against the Taliban?

### CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING

- 6. **MAKING INFERENCES** Some historians call the Soviet-Afghan war the Soviet Union's "Vietnam." What do they mean by this reference? Do you agree with it?
- 7. **DRAWING CONCLUSIONS** Why might Afghanis have been willing to accept Taliban rule by 1998?
- 8. **IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS** Why did the new nations of Central Asia experience such economic difficulties?
- 9. **WRITING ACTIVITY** **POWER AND AUTHORITY** Imagine you are a speechwriter for Hamid Karzai. Write what you feel would be an appropriate **first paragraph** for his initial speech upon taking power.

### CONNECT TO TODAY CREATING A TIME LINE

Choose one of the countries discussed in this section and create a **time line** of the eight to ten most significant events in its history over the last 50 years.